

one would scarcely expect—he is an ardent student of history, and a prodigious memory enables him to expatiate with authority on the great leaders of the past.

Snakes do not constitute the sole theme for there is much of interest about the country, local customs, such oddities as the stilt dancers, duck-billed women and the whip scorpion, as well as Africa of the past; and, in particular, about the changing Africa. The illustrations are wonderful and those in colour, superb; if one had to select one for special mention there is little doubt that the choice would be the green mamba “making her magical rope-bridge through the air”.

C. R. S. P.

THE CURIOUS WORLD OF SNAKES. By ALFRED LEUTSCHER. The Bodley Head. 13s. 6d.

This is a small book about snakes, nicely illustrated by Barrie Driscoll, though why the publisher's blurb should describe these illustrations as “a dramatic accompaniment to the text” I cannot imagine.

The first half of the book gives some general information about snakes; the second half describes, in no very great detail, some particular species in various parts of the world. The book is intended for children—not younger than nine and not older than fourteen I would say—and a child with an interest in natural history, or a dawning interest in snakes, might enjoy it. It would, however, be of no use to him as a reference book and this is, I think, its weakness. The book is not detailed nor informative enough and there is really no attempt at scientific classification or description. Latin names are not given. When a snake is shown with another creature—as for example the anaconda with a coypu—this animal's name is not given and this might be irritating to an enquiring child. The book is unlikely to be read by any but an enquiring child and for this child it would, I think, be unsatisfying.

In format the book is rather like the Puffin picture books but these are, of course, far more precisely informative and detailed. They also cost less. 13s. 6d. seems to me too much for this book. It is agreeable and, in its limited way, interesting.

M. J. D.

OKAVANGO. By JUNE KAY. Hutchinson. 21s.

Here is a book that is a simple account of travels through Africa by an author interested in natural history. Unfortunately it has been boosted right out of its own class and into one for which it is not qualified by the addition of an introduction by a well-known television personality. Without the introduction the book could have been dismissed as an entertaining and very readable travelogue. If a book of this type must have an introduction, obviously the introducer will say it is a good book, but to imply that it is good because most of the others are bad is a peculiar form of praise, and to say that five times is unnecessary.

The purpose of the travels is never very clearly stated, though there is a suggestion of photography and observation. This is not borne out by the plates, out of seventeen photos only three are of wild life and those three are disappointing. There is also a suggestion of fauna preservation—in the dedication—but much of the text is concerned with crocodile hunting. Nor is the attitude of the people concerned very consistent. For example, on p. 77 a hyena is shot as “vermin”, when doing nothing more harmful

than trying to get at the long dead carcass of a buffalo. Only twelve pages later some that were trying to raid the larder were spared "as hyenas do a useful scavenging job".

The introducer also likens "Okavango" to the works of the early explorers. Overlooking the fact that these men *walked* through unmapped country and did not travel in amphibious vehicles, there are a few valid comparisons. The old story of the crocodile's hinged upper jaw is reborn here. What a pity the author did not examine the skulls of any of the crocodiles that were shot during her travels. She would have seen that the skull is constructed in the same way as that of any other vertebrate! And, like the Africa of the old explorers, it is a continent inhabited by two kinds of people or rather, "people" and "natives". To the reviewer, who spent many years in a self-governing African country, continual and unnecessary repetition of the word "native" is distasteful.

In several cases a new and curious classification of the animal kingdom is implied. A fish (barbel) is promoted to a "mud-loving lung-amphibian" and crocodiles are apparently fish masquerading as reptiles, for "the ears were cleverly concealed gills"!

J. I. M.

WILDLIFE IN BRITAIN. By RICHARD FITTER. Penguin Books. 7s. 6d.

This is an introduction to the study of natural history for the enquirer who wants some general knowledge of the British countryside. It starts with the physical setting and shows how Great Britain's geology and climate have given these islands an unequalled diversity of habitats. There are examples, with good illustrations, of many kinds of plants and animals and, at the end of each chapter, a good list of books for further reading.

Included in the chapter "Conservation in Britain" is a map showing nature reserves and refuges and research stations throughout the country, with their headquarters. A valuable appendix gives a list of Natural History Societies which are members of the Council for Nature.

The author rightly condemns those photographers who think a successful picture more important than the welfare of their subjects. It would be well if this precept were followed in cinematography especially in films of African wild life. Perhaps he is sometimes a little too optimistic about about what may be quickly discovered in country walks and even in other ways—if mealworms were as easily and quickly bred as he describes, they would not cost 2s. 6d. an ounce in pet shops—but these are small criticisms and the book can be warmly recommended for its excellent value. Moreover it is inexpensive.

C. L. B.

THE GOSHAWK. By T. H. WHITE. Penguin Modern Classics, 1963. 3s.

When this book was first published in 1951 by Jonathan Cape it was received with great acclaim in literary circles. Selected chapters were even broadcast on the B.B.C.'s Third Programme.

Few would disagree that as a writer T. H. White deserves the highest praise; it is as a falconer that he comes to grief. Early in the first chapter he admits to the possession of three textbooks on falconry, one modern, one Victorian and one Stuart. But he does not explain that his training methods are based on the instructions of these writers, nor does he give any reason for this divergence. Critical falconers will find themselves at variance with